

TRANSIT OPERATORS FEEL PAIN AT THE PUMP: NEW PLAN TO ADDRESS FUEL CONCERNS

Gone are the days of low fuel prices. Crude oil prices averaged \$72.00 per barrel in 2007, but by late June 2008, the price had risen to approximately \$135.00 per barrel—an 88 percent increase. Odds are, by the time you receive this newsletter, fuel prices will have increased again.

Transit operators are facing a difficult paradox as fuel costs take up a larger portion of their operating budgets, and the demand for service is increasing due to the impact of fuel costs on individual consumers.



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the August 2008 issue of Connection, DRPT's external newsletter. You'll notice in this issue that while our cover story deals with a hard issue that many of us are facing today,

there is cause for excitement for the future as we move into a new fiscal year. Programs are being launched, awards are being won and plans are under development to help improve the transportation system in the Commonwealth.

In the August issue of Connection, you will read about how DRPT is working to address fuel concerns as the increase in gas prices impacts transit operators both across the country and throughout the Commonwealth. You will learn about DRPT's FY2009 Business Plan and our efforts to create a State Safety Oversight Program for Virginia. You'll read about the progress DRPT has made on statewide planning initiatives. Finally, you will read about the many reasons that we have cause to celebrate in the Commonwealth, including national and state transit awards, program launches, program successes and new facility openings.

I hope you enjoy reading the August issue of Connection, and feel free to send us your business news for future issues at drptpr@drpt.virginia.gov.



A recent national survey by the American Public Transportation Association found that from 2004 to 2008, fuel costs rose 166 percent and the share of transit operating costs dedicated to fuel increased from 6 to 11 percent. The survey concluded that this increase forced transit operators to take action, with 48 percent of bus operator respondents indicating that they increased fares.

Virginia faces a similar situation. Some transit operators have recently increased fares, based largely on high fuel prices, and virtually all operators are seeing ridership increases.

So what is being done to address fuel concerns in the Commonwealth?

DRPT is developing a Statewide Fuel Shortage Contingency Plan to evaluate the impact of fuel cost increases on public transportation and develop policy recommendations to help address operator needs. The plan will help DRPT prepare for continued price increases and potential shortages of fuel as it relates to public transportation, and how these events could affect Virginians.

The data collection portion of the plan has been completed, including a statewide survey of transit agencies, a review of fuel procurement practices, a review of existing fuel contingency plans in Virginia and a review of other state fuel contingency plans.

Next steps include data analysis and development of planning goals, objectives, guidelines and implementation strategies. Recommendations from the plan may include new programs, policy decisions, identification of new funding streams or identification of other issues that may need to be addressed through a policy or program.

The plan is scheduled to be completed in fall 2008.

STATEWIDE PLANNING INITIATIVE UPDATE

DRPT's statewide planning initiatives are progressing.

The draft Statewide Rail Plan was issued in mid-July and public meetings were held statewide to receive comments on the draft plan. The plan will be finalized after publication of the Rail Action Plan in September 2008, which will outline a resource allocation plan for passenger and freight rail improvements. The Statewide Transit Plan is currently under development, and review teams have been formed to review the plan's scope of work and preliminary data findings. Public meetings will be held this fall/winter to review data analysis results and receive comments on draft goals and objectives for the plan. More information on DRPT's planning efforts is available online at www.drpt.virginia.gov.



RICHMOND BRT STUDY ADVANCES

DRPT worked with the Richmond Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) to conduct an analysis of GRTC service to identify short and long term improvements. The analysis identified Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as a potential transit improvement, and DRPT is leading the study, sponsored by GRTC, to determine the feasibility of BRT in Richmond. DRPT is moving into the planning process for the project and is laying the framework for an Alternatives Analysis, the first step in determining if BRT is the right transit solution for the area.

TELEWORK!VA PROGRAM EXPERIENCING GROWTH

Telework!VA is a program administered by DRPT to help manage congestion on Virginia's roads by providing incentives and technical assistance to businesses seeking to establish or expand telework programs for employees. The program has been a success since its launch in 2001, and has recently experienced significant growth. Enrollment more than doubled in FY2007. To-date, more than 120 businesses and non-profits have been served by the program. For more information on Telework!VA visit www.teleworkva.org.

DRPT will host September Transit/TDM grantee workshops to update grantees on various DRPT initiatives. See the Upcoming Events section for dates or contact Courtney Ware at Courtney.Ware@drpt.virginia.gov for more information.

SEPTEMBER 22–25 IS TRY TRANSIT WEEK! Sign Up to Win a Year's Free Transit Pass



Over the past few months, DRPT has been working with local transit operators to plan and execute elements of Try Transit Week, a promotional event to encourage people to stop driving alone and use a form of transit such as bus and rail service, carpools, vanpools or telework.

Virginians are being asked to visit the Try Transit Week Web site to pledge to try transit in their area and enter to win a year's free pass to a transit provider of their choice. Awards will also be presented to the locality with the highest number of pledges at the celebration event in Richmond on September 25. More information on Try Transit Week, and how to get on board, is available at www.trytransitweek.com.

GRTC WINS APTA'S OUTSTANDING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



The Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) was honored with the Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement Award by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The annual award honors one public transportation system in each of four categories for the operator who has demonstrated the highest achievement in efficiency and effectiveness over three consecutive years. The award criteria apply to all business areas such as safety, operations, customer service, financial management, human resources, minority and women advancement, marketing, policy and administration, and community relations. GRTC was named the top transit operator in the four to 30 million trips category, which includes over 100 transit systems throughout the United States. GRTC will receive the award at the APTA Annual Meeting in October. For more information on GRTC service visit www.ridegrtc.com.

COMMONWEALTH STATE SAFETY OVERSIGHT (SSO) PROGRAM ADVANCES



DRPT is developing the SSO Program for the Commonwealth to oversee all new fixed guideway transit systems seeking to operate in Virginia.

The first project to be guided by the new SSO Program will be the construction and operation of Norfolk's

light rail transit system, The Tide. The next step in the development process is a peer review with the American Public Transportation Association. The peer review will evaluate the Commonwealth's SSO program standard and compare the program against best practices from other programs across the country. The peer review is scheduled to take place this summer.

FEDERAL NEWS

- In June, the House of Representatives approved the "Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008," which includes \$14.4 billion in Amtrak and passenger rail funding over a five-year period. The bill authorizes \$2.5 billion in grants to states for capital costs associated with new or improved passenger rail and authorizes \$1.75 billion for grants to states and/or Amtrak for construction of high-speed rail corridors. In October 2007, the Senate passed similar legislation which included \$11.4 billion for Amtrak and intercity passenger rail. Sponsors of both pieces of legislation hope to hold a conference to draft a final piece of legislation to send to the President before the end of the year.
- In June, the House Subcommittee on Homeland Security Appropriations approved the FY2009 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations

bill, which included \$400 million for transit and rail security grants. The bill was sent to the full House for consideration. A date has not been set for Senate review of the bill.

- In June, the House of Representatives approved the "Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008" that authorizes the investment of almost \$2 billion in U.S. public transportation systems. The bill provides \$750 million in both FY2008 and FY2009 for 5307 grants for urbanized areas and \$100 million in both FY2008 and FY2009 for 5311 grants for non-urbanized areas. Both grants support capital and operating costs for public transportation systems. The Senate has not taken up a similar bill and the Bush Administration has stated opposition to the bill.



CONNECTION



Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

1313 E. Main St.
Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

DID YOU KNOW...

- The Blackstone Area Bus System (BABS) moved into its new facility in June, complete with office space and mechanical bays where buses and equipment can be serviced. For more information on BABS, visit

www.townofblackstoneva.com.



- JAUNT recently completed a rebranding effort, launching a new logo and Web site. The buses even got a makeover! The rebranding effort is attracting new customers to JAUNT, which provides transit service in Charlottesville, Albemarle, Fluvanna, Louisa, Nelson, Buckingham and Amherst Counties. For more information, visit www.ridejaunt.org.

- Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC) received the Commonwealth Council on Aging's 2008 Best Practices Award in the transportation category. The award recognized MEOC for successfully integrating human service and public transportation and providing enhanced transportation options in southwest Virginia. For more information on MEOC, visit www.meoc.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 9/9,15,16 DRPT Transit/TDM Grantee Workshops, Roanoke, Richmond and Northern Virginia
- 9/14 AASHTO National Transportation Management Conference, Spokane, WA
- 9/17-18 Commonwealth Transportation Board Meeting, Staunton, VA
- 9/22-25 Try Transit Week, Statewide
- 10/5-8 APTA Annual Meeting and International Public Transportation Expo, San Diego, CA
- 10/8-9 2008 National Transit Database Training Seminar, Arlington, VA
- 10/15-16 Commonwealth Transportation Board Meeting, Richmond, VA
- 10/16 AASHTO Annual Meeting, Hartford, CT
- 10/22 DRPT Quarterly Rail Stakeholder Meeting, Richmond, VA
- 10/24 DRPT Quarterly Transit/TDM Stakeholder Meeting, Richmond, VA
- 10/26-29 APTA Rail~Volution 2008, San Francisco, CA